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1967/10/04

MEMORANDUM

38
THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON
October 5, 1967
7:15 p.m.

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EYES ONLY

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QUOTE LBJ
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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Tom
FROM: Tom Johnson

Attached are the notes of your meeting in the Cabinet Room
on October 4, 1967.

Those who attended were Secretary McNamara, Secretary Rusk
and Walt Rostow.

The meeting began at 7:02 p.m. The meeting ended at 7:55 p.m.

Attachment.

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DETERMINED TO BE AN
ADMINISTRATIVE MARKING.

BY DLH ON 12-11-81

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By Law, NARS, Date 11-9-83

Meeting began: 7:02 p.m.
Meeting ended: 7:55 p.m.

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NOTES OF THE PRESIDENT'S MEETING
WITH
SECRETARY McNAMARA
SECRETARY RUSK
WALT ROSTOW
GEORGE CHRISTIAN

October 4, 1967
Cabinet Room

THE PRESIDENT: I received a report this afternoon from two Congressmen that will make every man proud who has served in the Air Force. The Congressmen said they talked with some Air Force personnel in Vietnam who said they would rather build than destroy. Have any of you talked with Percy about his resolution?

Secretary McNamara and Walt Rostow said they had discussed his resolution, pointing out the flaws in it.

SECRETARY McNAMARA: The strongest argument we have for our presence in South Vietnam is that the other nations in that area want us there.

THE PRESIDENT: I told Senator Dirksen today that we do not want to supplant South Vietnam but we do want to support it. I told him that I want him to go out there and look at it from stem to stern.

SECRETARY McNAMARA: Percy has a nasty resolution, but he says he wants to help us. He is saying that the Johnson Administration will not listen to him.

THE PRESIDENT: Tell Percy that we will listen to him at any time and any place. There certainly is not any doubt about our willingness to have him heard. What do you say now about Bo?

SECRETARY RUSK: We received two messages today. We ought not to hurry. We need our scenario. It's best to do it on a steady basis.

We should keep the dialogue going and not let the matter come to a head quickly.

We ought to get M & A out on this. We need for Kissinger to see Bo on procedural matters.

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An unconditional suspension was mentioned. I do not think it means they are changing from a position of permanent cessation to a different position, however.

A crucial phrase was withdrawn from the second message. They took out "solemn engagement to talk" after cessation of bombing. They are still weaseling on us.

THE PRESIDENT: In view of that, why don't we leave the circle around Hanoi but clear up everything short of Hanoi. We need to get our target list down to the lowest level possible.

I know this bombing must be hurting them. Despite any reports to the contrary, I can feel it in my bones. The guns are not silent on the DMZ tonight because of anything due to the bombing damage. We need to pour the steel on. Let's hit them every day and go every place except Hanoi.

I want you to get me in shape to make a decision when I can.

SECRETARY McNAMARA: There are 24 targets remaining. I believe they hit five of them last night, which would get this down to 19. About half of these are in Hanoi and about half in Haiphong.

THE PRESIDENT: What are the reasons for not hitting these?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: The basic argument in Hanoi is that the strikes would result in very high civilian casualties. The basic argument in Haiphong is the fear of hitting Soviet ships.

As far as the Bo-Kisinger discussions, Kisinger said to Bo through the two agents (M & A) that we would stop the bombing if they would talk. We said that we assumed they would not take military advantage of that halt.

Bo came back with two points:

- (1) He seems to be anxious to have the contacts continue
- (2) He stops short of a flat commitment to talk.

MR. ROSTOW: In their first message he said if you stop the bombing without conditions, we undertake a solemn pledge to talk. We do not have exact text of what Bo said. It is due to arrive in the mail. All we

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have is M's report.

SECRETARY McNAMARA: As I understand it, if we stop the bombing without conditions, the commitment is a solemn engagement to talk at the end of bombing. ↗

SECRETARY RUSK: I said earlier that could be "prompt."

THE PRESIDENT: Now I need to get all of this straight. What are they saying exactly? Is this it: We would stop the bombing if prompt and productive discussions began, assuming they would not take military advantage of it?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: Bo has not said anything very clearly.

(Secretary McNamara then showed the President exactly what Bo had said in the memos.)

THE PRESIDENT: Well, where does that leave us now?

SECRETARY RUSK: What we delayed this meeting for, from 6:30 until 7, has not come in yet. We expect it any time.

THE PRESIDENT: I'm not as encouraged by all of this as you all are.

SECRETARY McNAMARA: This isn't that simple. I could ask a thousand questions about each word they have used in these communications.

SECRETARY RUSK: They have used the words stop - cessation - and end. If you look these up in the dictionary all of these mean permanent.

SECRETARY McNAMARA: Yes, we may have to state the bombing halt as permanent in the public pronouncements to meet their conditions.

However, we have gained a very clear understanding that they want to keep talks going. ↗

THE PRESIDENT: Who exactly are M & A? They aren't our people, are they?

SECRETARY RUSK: No, A is a scientist; M is a Communist.

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SECRETARY McNAMARA: Kisinger has been a very shrewd negotiator. He is the best I've seen in my seven years.

THE PRESIDENT: Where is he today?

MR. ROSTOW: Kisinger is in Boston.

THE PRESIDENT: As I understand it, Bob, we now have twenty-four targets that are unauthorized. What percentage do these represent?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: Well, let me give you a few statistics:

- There are 9,000 targets in the bombing encyclopedia.
- 5,000 of these are military targets.
- Many of these are worthless.
- 1700 of these have been hit.
- The JCS consider 400 to 600, presently 412, as "important fixed targets."
- There are only 24 of these 412 not authorized (that is 5.8%.)
- Nine of these targets are in the Haiphong area and about 15 in Hanoi.

THE PRESIDENT: Hit all you can.

SECRETARY McNAMARA: You will never get it down to zero.

THE PRESIDENT: I want the Defense Department to get its very best military information and make it available to the senior staff at the State Department. Likewise, I want the very best State Department information provided to the best people at the Department of Defense so that everybody knows what we are doing and what they should be saying. I am getting very good reaction from General Walt's speeches. We need to get more men around doing this.

SECRETARY McNAMARA: We must be very careful not to pressure the military to take on political tasks.

THE PRESIDENT: Scotty Reston is doing a story on disloyalty in government. He says that disloyalty to a President has never been higher -- not even President Lincoln -- to senior government personnel. Once Reston writes that article, that is the line that many of the columnists and commentators are going to take.

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If you want to oppose the President, that's O.K. but do not say he lied to anybody. I do not have several policies on Vietnam. If you look at the history of the decisions on Vietnam you will find that we have been consistent.

In any case this story has a theme that there is disloyalty in the highest ranks. It seems to make reference to the Newsweek story talking about various Cabinet members spreading anti-administration information around town.

We have got to sell our product to the American people. I want to counter these arguments about the South Vietnamese not fighting, about the value of an enclave theory, and about the pay-off to stopping the bombing.

As George Christian told me last night, and Christian is not a man to overstate anything, it is pathetic to see how well we agree in these meetings and our story does not get out because of what your people at the State Department and your people in the Defense Department are doing to you.

I do not want to change Zorthian unless you think he should be changed. Some of our people have been saying that he is rather cynical on our position.

SECRETARY RUSK: My press people tell me he has the complete faith of the press people in Vietnam.

MR. ROSTOW: If I may, I have two sources who advise me that Zorthian has very bad relations with MACV. As some source of confirmation for press cynicism, I have heard this from two good sources. He has two big jobs.

THE PRESIDENT: I understand he may not be handling the psychological warfare end of it very well. I am told he spends too much time on himself and not enough time helping Secretary McNamara and Secretary Rusk and the President. I've never known a press man yet who was any good when he built himself more than he did the President. We need press officers who say yes, I am protecting the President and my government. I want to see it do well and I am going to do everything I can to accomplish that objective.

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We need an imaginative new man out there for the psychological warfare end of it. We need a good hard reporter to put out the news.

In any case let's analyze every argument that is being made against our current position and have the answers.

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